Culture Clusters: the Middle East Cluster

"This Proto-Indo-European term ghosti referred to a kind of unspoken etiquette, a notion that on seeing strangers on the horizon, rather than choose to fell them with spears or sling-shots, instead we should take the risk of welcoming them across our threshold – on the chance that they might bring new notions, new goods, fresh blood with them.
Over time this word-idea evolved into the Greek xenia – ritualised guest–host friendship, an understanding that stitched together the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds."

- Bettany Hughes, Istanbul: A Tale of Three Cities -

The
Middle East
Cluster includes
the following
countries:

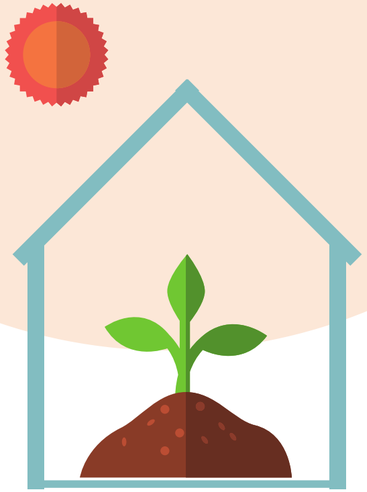
Egypt
Kuwait
Morocco
Qatar
Turkey

Designed by Freepik

HIGH-CONTEXT cultures:
communication is mostly indirect and implicit, requiring a certain degree of contextual knowledge to be fully understood.
The use of non-verbal communication (voice, gestures, etc) is significant.

Since reliance on written communication is relatively low, knowledge of unwritten rules, social codes and rituals tends to be assumed. Procedures are somewhat flexible, decisions are based on feelings and emotional factors.

POLYCHRONIC
cultures are past-oriented, they see time as a cyclical concept, a repetition of natural cycles and patterns. Punctuality is not a primary concern, people tend to live for the moment, plans can be altered to fit a situation as it changes.



Life is unpredictable and scheduling is not fundamental. Previous commitments will be respected if possible. Members of a polychronic culture manage interruptions well and tend to do many things at once.

HONOUR/SHAME cultures:
Shame, a reaction to other people's criticism, is the main tool of social control in collectivist societies. In the Middle East cluster honor and shame are linked to race, social standing and to perceived "manliness".
Failure to meet expectations is bound to bring shame and dishonor.

Individuals in a high social position are expected to "behave their status" (eg, to dress smartly and to drive a nice car), to be the person others expect them to be, and to preserve family honor.

“Honor-shame cultures do have morality, but their basis for defining right and wrong happens to be communal and relational (not legal or philosophical). For them, what is best for relationships and honors people is morally right; what shames is morally wrong."
(Georges and Baker, 2016)

Culture Clusters: the Middle East Cluster

BEING
Cultures:
Relationship-oriented.
The needs to maintain the collective well-being and to respect tradition are prioritized over task outcomes.
Trust and affiliation are important.

Middle Eastern cultures tend to value cooperation, social harmony and group consensus.
The development of a supportive social networks is considered a priority.

https://www.muditaconsultancy.com/en/resource-center/visuals

COLLECTIVIST
Cultures:
The common good is more important than personal interest. The group takes care of individuals, individuals are loyal to the group. Relationships are likely to be formed within the group people belong to, often inaccessible to outsiders.

Defining one's identity in terms of one's social role is typical of collectivist cultures. Conformity and selflessness are highly valued in this family- and group oriented cluster (family intended as "extended" rather than "immediate" family).

A peculiarity of this cluster is that it scores high in In-Group Collectivism ("the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families") and lower on Institutional Collectivism ("the degree to which organizational and societal institutions encourage individuals to be integrated into groups and organizations").

While individuals tend to feel a strong sense of obligation toward their families and organizations (a clear distinction is made between in-groups and out-groups), they don't necessarily strive to ensure that resources and opportunities are accessible to all members of the society.

POWER DISTANCE:

In high Power Distance societies, people depend to a large extent on "power holders". Subordinates are not empowered and are expected to take orders, not to act independently.

They refrain from expressing disagreement and accept to comply without questioning the situation.Communication (vertical /downwards) is cautious and highly ineffective: subordinates do not often have the chance to approach their managers and when they do, they fear raising issues that might put the power holder in a difficult position.
Hierarchy is normal and accepted, there is an emotional distance between individuals believed to be at different social levels.

GENDER EGALITARIANISM:
societies in the Middle East cluster are mostly defined by low scores on Gender Egalitarianism.
This cluster is male-dominated, gender roles tend to be clearly defined, the family structure is "traditional" (e.g. fathers deal with facts, mothers deal with feelings) and hierarchical.

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE:
Middle Eastern societies tend to score high in this particular cultural dimension. Tradition matters, social interactions are often formal and conservative, decisions are based on consensus. These societies have a strong emotional need for rules and regulations in order to prevent uncertain outcomes or to mitigate their impact, even though they are not necessarily followed.
In Middle Eastern countries bureaucracy tends to be elaborated and time-consuming.

SOURCES

- Georges, J., & Baker, Mark D. (2016). "Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures". IL: InterVarsity Press
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (1984). "Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication". New York: Random House
- Hall, E. T. (1959). “The Silent Language”. New York: Doubleday
- Hall, E.T. (1966). "The Hidden Dimension", New York, NY: Doubleday
- Hall, E. T. (1976). "Beyond culture". New York, NY: Doubleday
- Herbert R. (1946). “The chrysanthemum and the sword : patterns of Japanese culture”. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Hiebert, Paul G. (1985). “Anthropological Insights for Missionaries”. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House
- Hofstede, Geert H. (1997). "Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind (second ed.)". New York: McGraw-Hill
- House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (2004). "Culture, leadership, and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies". CA: Thousand Oaks
- House, R., Javidan, M., Hanges, P., & Dorfman, P. (2002). "Understanding cultures and implicit leadership theories across the GLOBE: An introduction to project GLOBE". Journal of World Business, 37(1), 3–10.
- Kluckhohn, F. and Strodtbeck, F. (1961). "Variations in value orientation". New York: Harper Collins
- The Globe Project, Online: https://globeproject.com/